

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences – An Overview

"How would the proverbial Martian landing on Earth view the intelligence of the human species?" That's the provocative question asked by Harvard professor of education, Howard Gardner.

Would he (it?) demand to know individual IQs? Or would he (it) be interested in those humans performing exceptionally well in particular fields—the chess master, the orchestral conductor, perhaps even the athlete? These accomplished people are undoubtedly considered to be talented and intelligent. Why then do our methods of assessing intelligence often fail to identify them? Why is it that people with IQs of 160 end up working for people with IQs of 100?

Gardner developed the "Theory of Multiple Intelligences" which says, in effect, that IQ should not be measured as an absolute figure in the way that height, weight or blood pressure are. It's a crucial blunder, he maintains, to assume that IQ is a single fixed entity which can be measured by a pencil and paper test.

It's not how smart you are but how you are smart, says Gardner. As human beings, we all have a repertoire of skills, he says, for solving different kinds of problems. And he defines intelligence this way: "An intelligence is an ability to solve a problem or fashion a product which is valued in one or more cultural settings."

Gardner revealed his theory in his ground-breaking book "Frames of Mind" in which he outlined seven distinct intelligences. He subsequently added an eighth.

Linguistic Intelligence

The ability to read, write and communicate with words. Authors, journalists, poets, orators and comedians are obvious examples of people with linguistic intelligence.

- Famous examples: Charles Dickens, Abraham Lincoln, T.S. Eliot, Sir Winston Churchill.

Logical-Mathematical Intelligence

The ability to reason and calculate, to think things through in a logical, systematic manner. These are the kinds of skills highly developed in engineers, scientists, economists, accountants, detectives and members of the legal profession.

- Famous examples: Albert Einstein, John Dewey.

Visual–Spatial Intelligence

The ability to think in pictures, visualize a future result. To imagine things in your mind's eye. Architects, sculptors, sailors, photographers and strategic planners. You use it when you have a sense of direction, when you navigate or draw.

- Famous examples: Picasso, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Musical Intelligence

The ability to make or compose music, to sing well, or understand and appreciate music. To keep rhythm. It's a talent obviously enjoyed by musicians, composers, and recording engineers. But most of us have a musical intelligence which can be developed. Think of how helpful it is to learn with a jingle or rhyme (e.g. "Thirty days has September...").

- Famous examples: Mozart, Leonard Bernstein, Ray Charles.

Bodily–Kinesthetic Intelligence

The ability to use your body skillfully to solve problems, create products or present ideas and emotions. An ability obviously displayed for athletic pursuits, dancing, acting, artistically, or in building and construction. You can include surgeons in this category but many people who are physically talented—"good with their hands"—don't recognize that this form of intelligence is of equal value to the other intelligences.

- Famous examples: Charlie Chaplin, Michael Jordan.

Interpersonal (Social) Intelligence

The ability to work effectively with others, to relate to other people, and display empathy and understanding, to notice their motivations and goals. This is a vital human intelligence displayed by good teachers, facilitators, therapists, politicians, religious leaders and sales people.

- Famous examples: Gandhi, Ronald Reagan, Mother Teresa, Oprah Winfrey.

Intrapersonal Intelligence

The ability for self-analysis and reflection—to be able to quietly contemplate and assess one's accomplishments, to review one's behavior and innermost feelings, to make plans and set goals, the capacity to know oneself. Philosophers, counselors, and many peak performers in all fields of endeavor have this form of intelligence.

- Famous examples: Freud, Eleanor Roosevelt, Plato.

In 1996, Gardner decided to add an eighth intelligence (Naturalist) and in spite of much speculation resisted the temptation to add a ninth–Spiritualist Intelligence.

Naturalist Intelligence

The ability to recognize flora and fauna, to make other consequential distinctions in the natural world and to use this ability productively—for example in hunting, farming, or biological science. Farmers, botanists, conservationists, biologists, environmentalists would all display aspects of the intelligence.

- Famous examples: Charles Darwin, E.O. Wilson.